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The Postmodern Improvisor

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THE POSTMODERN IMPROVISER

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Paul F. Caraher, III

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THE POSTMODERN IMPROVISER

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PREFACE

This thesis represents a revitalization of the thesis form because it has organically blossomed from an integrated consciousness. Instead of the pre-existing thesis form for a Master of Arts Degree in English bending, limiting, and shaping the content, I have shaped the form according to my own synthetic ambition, resulting in a fusion of elements from both a researched and a creative thesis. This strategy is justified since the very subject of the thesis stresses the improviser's ongoing urge to create as the spontaneous moment/impulse requires while simultaneously creating an organic frame or unique inner logic. Above all, this project is a translation of autobiographical reflections which have crystalized years of intense struggle, culminating with my hard fought liberation from the hollow shell of garage band mediocrity.

As an undergraduate in college, I desired the invigorating embrace of knowledge—a natural reaction to my solitary existence. All of the uncultivated energies of frustration stemming from my acute sense of ostracism fueled the emerging powers of my intellect. Directing these powers, my will intuitively prepared for the tenebrous tunnel of claustrophobic self-doubt. It was as if my reading of the existential ideas of Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre during my senior year in high school gradually had grown into something too big to fit into a small box labeled “cold theory.” In other words, I began my very real struggle with the inside demons by slowly shaping a new self from the nucleus outwards, thereby pushing that useless self, molded by years of incessant ridicule, into the atmosphere where it would quickly dissipate.

As with any complex structure, several stages of development must be completed, and each stage comprises many distinct aspects. Having internalized the existential formula “experience precedes essence,” my self structure-in-progress pursued the works of the Western canon—a three prong attack highlighting literature (Shakespeare, Wordsworth), philosophy (Plato, Aristotle), and especially music (Bach, Tchaikovsky). I created a self-definition based on a desire to understand and eventually reach their level of thinking in my own thinking. Consequently I avoided people as much as possible and began my autodidactic studies by climbing further into self-analysis which was spurred on by the electricity of books. This realm of books was a secure place inhabited by friendly spirits who would not lash out a verdict of “guilty and sentenced to life in prison.” Of course, these aspects/achievements only comprised one stage of development, and my inside demons continued to growl, continued to overshadow my success writing exceptional papers, understanding philosophical arguments, and learning Bach fugues by ear. I still gave in to these undesirable influences, for too often and too easily I was weakened by a stiff, yet nervous, sense of anxiety. In this state, voices spoke sneeringly: “You haven’t done anything; you’re still worthless.” In short, my problem shook my entire being from the physical (giving rise to headaches, exhaustion, and insomnia) to the emotional (giving rise to a numbing indifference dressed in self-effacing sarcasm) and, above all, to the spiritual (giving rise to the agnostic vacuum residuum left from the inadequacy of my experience with Catholicism).

During this period of self-doubt and spiritual malaise, I often descended into the tar pit of self-pity (that very same kind of dead-end narcissistic feeling characterizing the aspects of grunge anti-music which I consider in this thesis). In this state, I wrote mediocre poetry, ate too much junk food and, most importantly, stagnated in my musical abilities.

As an electric guitarist, I was afflicted with the very same disease which continues to prevent almost all young electric guitarists from cultivating an original voice. I'm speaking of the disease's swift power in turning every intellectually dead guitarist into yet another repetition of a formulaic soup can on an Andy Warhol canvas. Fortunately, my intellectual development and intense philosophic curiosity kept me from becoming satisfied with the predictable rock guitarist's goal: faithfully producing the anti-musical equivalent of a smasmodic, decapitated chicken slamdancing to its death.

After living for twenty-one years without a consistent voice of encouragement, I realized it was futile to expect any help or understanding from living people. I sought strength elsewhere. Since the spirits I befriended in books always understood my situation, it was natural for me to build upon this by communing with the spirits living in tapes, records, and compact discs. Here I found my spiritual father. In retrospect, the encouragement Miles Davis gave me was the perfect weapon needed to destroy the demons of my inferiority complex. Slowly and systematically, I overcame my stiff, yet nervous, sense of anxiety by focusing on conveying a loose or relaxed yet consistent swing feel in my guitar playing. This victory marked the beginning of my spiritual stage of development; every practice became an exercise in meditation. For example, I would set the metronome at a slow tempo and play a constant flow of eighth notes. After ten or fifteen minutes, I would tire thereby necessitating a fresh reinforcement of will power. I evicted much of the rage and bitterness of twenty-one years during these sessions of physical endurance. Furthermore, these meditations would later become the construction site for my willful creation of an integrated consciousness.

Upon entering Western Kentucky University, I vacillated between the goal of becoming a professor or becoming one of the greatest improvisers and composers of the twenty-first century. Obviously since the latter goal requires great effort, I still had to prove to myself that my ambition was not a delusion of grandeur. Several significant

events coupled with the growing strength of my will aided my decision in choosing the latter goal. First of all, the practices/meditations/explorations brought me to a new level of possibility. From 1991 to 1993, I worked on improvising with short phrases and gradually built a unique modal style. During 1993 and 1994, I expanded this development by adding a bass drone and switched to the classical guitar. Eventually I attempted to keep a consistent mood of musical thought and feeling for as long as possible. By the end of my first year at Western Kentucky University, I was able to improvise on a single free form song for over an hour. I had tapped into my inside universe, and musical ideas were everywhere distinct yet related.

Another significant event occurred when I made the connection between the two realms of my new self: the intellectual/philosophical and the musical/spiritual. These two realms always had influenced each other as evidenced by my undergraduate intellectual success fueling my first attempts at thinking in motion on the guitar, i.e., improvisation. Moreover, the musical breakthrough I achieved through the form of extended free form improvisation compelled me to understand this discovery in a more comprehensive way. That is, the profound effect of exploring musical ideas for long periods of time involved a penetrating realization whereby all the facets of my consciousness were viewed as essentially integrated and vital.

In short, this thesis is a concrete manifestation of that realization. I have synthesized many influences in order to create a kind of mythology or philosophy for the postmodern improviser. Influences ranging from Eastern ideas of oneness to the postmodern ideas found in deconstruction and theories of intertextuality became integral parts once the frame and connecting links of my revelatory experience coupled with a desire to create a lasting memorial of this renewal were established. The personal struggle of twenty-four years was compressed into three months, naturally requiring herculean strength and resulting in an intensity of heat melting the obligatory icy and objective tone

for a thesis. I asked myself, “What is the point of adding another thesis to the thesis assembly line when the very subject of my work argues for improvisation or the spontaneous impulse guiding the structure?” The form should be free, but this freedom is not the same as the chaos of subjective self-indulgence. My thesis, rather, is a fusion of many antithetical elements, a fusion that echoes the main point of my written creation: subjective/objective, creative/researched, Eastern/Western, improvisation/revision, as well as a synthesis of genres: music criticism, cultural criticism, media criticism, literary criticism, philosophy, history, psychology, a bonus free verse poetic translation of a musical improvisation, and even some numerology for good measure (i.e., my privileging of three over two and four). And undergirding it all, autobiography. Enjoy!

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THE POSTMODERN IMPROVISER

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64 pages

Directed by: Karen Schneider, Lloyd Davies, and Will Fridy
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I intend to demonstrate that the illogically presumptuous nature of postmodernism, which gives rise to the nihilism of many generation Xers, stands in contradistinction to the improviser's willful surrender to the eternal force that cannot be contained by the demands of the profit motive. After establishing some possible origins for postmodernism, I will limit my argument to dealing with those messages from television, advertising, and grunge anti-music that blatantly contradict the wisdom of the eternal force as channeled through the improviser.

The first chapter will constitute a free form improvisation, basing its far-reaching explorations on three principal themes—the divine impulse-generated circle of separation/connection, the improviser's willful surrender to this circle, and the Faustian separation's postmodern culmination which rejects/fears this circle. This first improvisation (chapter) will differ from the following two improvisations (chapters) in its emphasis on rhythmic heterogeneity and will be an attempt to represent a piece of the infinitely different cycles of divine motion. In so doing, several moods or colors will spin around the aforesaid themes in such a way as to disrupt the linear convention of introduction, body, and conclusion. By contrast, the second improvisation (chapter) will develop these themes via a single mood, focusing on separating/connecting with other thinkers. The final improvisation (third chapter) will focus on the difference between representative examples of jazz and grunge rock. The thesis (performance) will conclude/begin with a self-referential exploration, an improvised re-creation of the psyche's intense voyage during an improvisation.

The Head: Introducing the Principal Themes

In order to defend the art of improvisation from the suffocating tendencies of postmodernism, one must imaginatively situate this art within an idealized past. The true improviser today has to generate, through intense contemplation, an environment conducive to his urge to create; the incessant, vertiginous blitzkrieg of incoherent imagery and newspeak will not do. Therefore, speculation involving a world dominated by creative impulses, or any manifestation driven by divinity—I mean something that defies rational explanation—enables the improviser in constructing an essential self-definition characterized by 1) the paradoxical motion of separation and connection (explained momentarily) and 2) the continuous interaction between the physical, the intellectual, and the spiritual.

The process of separation and connection is mastered once the student improviser has disciplined the intellect to the extent that the divine impulse materializes. The term “divine impulse” attempts to signify that which defies the frozen closure of signification. For this reason, the great improviser, like any great poet, always has more to say since his vocabulary always constitutes a finite number of messages, however profound, which, by definition, cannot encapsulate the infinite’s essence. Indeed, to attempt to do so would not only be presumptuous but would be the end of one’s creativity and the beginning of one’s surrender to a dead form. Therefore, one must try to understand the “divine impulse” (as well as the other synonymous terms I shall use: the impulse, God, divine motion, original source, infinite essence, etc.) as the mysterious motivation which rewards the student who has endured, and continually endures, hours of strenuous physical and mental practice, by revealing his identification with the greater groove. This identification simply means the improviser’s ability to compose as he performs.

The impulse can take the improviser through unpredictable landscapes provided the will is eloquently versed in struggle. Only struggle, both physical (for example, pushing and stretching the fingers to exhaustion) and intellectual (maneuvering the chordal, melodic, rhythmic, structural, dynamic, and emotional possibilities), can release one from the burdensome, gravitational pull of postmodern nihilism. In other words, physical and intellectual struggle is needed to reach the heightened awareness wherein one's ability to play instantly anything one's spirit hears is diametrically opposed to the tendency to commodify salvation, thereby denying or discouraging the beauty of struggle. This is why the improviser must look beyond the postmodern ideology which ridicules the importance of one's contemplative and expressive life, conditioning one to accept as normal and correct the decontextualized and memory-pulverizing jaded euphoria of novelty after novelty. An unlimited supply of circus sideshows is continually pumped out to meet this nihilistic demand, a demand which becomes all the more desperate once one blithely relinquishes the natural, philosophical curiosity or need for meaning. Such curiosity characterizes every child but is quickly extinguished by the mesmerically-repeated message which conditions one to substitute slogans for understanding, quick, painless solutions for profound struggle, and, above all, the replacement of dumb luck for intelligent willpower.

I intend to demonstrate that the illogically presumptuous nature of postmodernism, which gives rise to the nihilism of many generation Xers, stands in contradistinction to the improviser's willful surrender to the eternal force that cannot be contained by the demands of the profit motive. After establishing some possible origins for postmodernism, I will limit my argument to dealing with those messages from television, advertising, and grunge anti-music which blatantly contradict the wisdom of the eternal force as channeled through the improviser.

This wisdom specifically entails the paradoxical motion of separation and connection, which not only informs the improviser's relationship to the divine impulse and

his creation but also appears within each unique creation that is recorded and upon which the listener reflects. The act of separation and connection is simply the fundamental behavior of all life. From the smallest sub-atomic particles to the expanding universe itself, an immense diversity of materials or objects, along this daunting spectrum of reality, assert their essences through their relationships or connections with other objects. The extraordinary evolution of separation/connection has created an interesting entity—the human brain—capable of separating/connecting by itself, or at another level of motion.

The voluntary effort of stretching one's brain (I mean simply the healthy state of loving wisdom) is something most generation Xers are too indolently cynical to do. I plan to contrast this inability to separate/connect, which represses a natural human development, with the improviser's relationship to the divine impulse and his constantly evolving art form. The improviser, like all humans, feels the isolated sense of anxiety fundamental to his temporary occupation of a corporeal frame. His courageous answer to the creative challenge involves a spontaneous organization (i.e., separation/connection) of sounds, which mimics, as a child naturally imitates a parent, the eternal force/source. In solving the problem of his mortal isolation, he creates a symbolic connection (each unique improvisation) with the unexplainable infinite. This connection is simultaneously a separation from himself, which, in turn, is another connection (listening to the improvisation) with fellow human beings once they, too, separate from their narcissistic gear in order to connect (understanding its uniqueness), only to return separate (isolated), yet enriched, until another connection.

This model, of course, is an ideal. The true improviser obviously desires an appreciative, sympathetic audience with whom to share his beauty. Unfortunately, the more these potential audiences diminish (especially among generation Xers whose appalling ignorance of American jazz is quite obvious), the more the postmodern system's ubiquitous influence (the urge to turn almost every waking moment into a sales pitch)

conditions one to abandon the normal desire to separate/connect. To be sure, this nihilistic behavior is learned through imitation, just as the improviser imitates the divine impulse. However, in the former case, one cannot separate/connect precisely because one imitates a separation from separation/connection.

This separation from separation/connection brings me to another essential link in my argument. In addition to establishing some imaginative foundations for the true improviser, I also shall speculate on a possible origin for the postmodernist creation of a stifling realm that can radically homogenize one's consciousness. In developing this speculation, the term "Faustian separation" will represent the privileging of the static form, which amputates itself from the circulating flux, whereas the always new impulse fertilizes the form, producing, in turn, new impulses.

The postmodern realm is the culmination of the dead form and is precisely why true improvisation is ignored; it calls into question the fraud perpetuated every day whereby reality is reinterpreted to reflect narcissism and the perverse value of greed. Happiness is no longer understood in terms of one's engagement of the active will which involves physical, mental, and finally, spiritual struggle. Rather, happiness is attained through the continual accumulation of advertised objects, the desperate indulgence in celebrity fetishism, and the nihilistic desire to be duped by the infomercial charlatan. Moreover, the impulse cannot be heard over the din of banal anti-music filling almost every grocery store, restaurant, and mall and of the manipulative advertising driving most television and radio.

Finally, one must clarify the true improviser's impulse-fertilization of form. Once the student finds his connection to the impulse, he must accept and thereby direct its spontaneous, organic evolution of forms. By forms, I mean that impulse which the improviser's reflective mind can transmute into elastic containers, (e.g., an interesting combination of pitches suddenly played which then becomes an organizing structure for subsequent pitches) which, in turn, bring forth a series of related impulses. Indeed, the

ideal improviser must vigilantly keep the edges and dimensions of the form vital by injecting a constant flow of impulses. Thus, the impulse (which simply divides and multiplies or dies and relives in the improviser's urgent grasp of sounds through time and space) must travel within a circulating flux of opposite directions. In one direction, the impulses move along related trajectories on the plane of a specific, elastic container. In fact, they move from a shifting center (every passing present moment) out toward the edges of that particular, stretchable form. In the other direction, those impulses which define the form move back toward the center as new impulses arrive to evolve, or perhaps radically alter, the form. In this process, the form cannot become oppressive, unlike the dead postmodern form which can alienate one from the ability to channel these impulses. The improviser's form serves his impulse-generated creative freedom.

The following three chapters will embody my argument by themselves resembling free form improvisations. This approach does not mean they were literally composed in real time, but nevertheless these chapters (improvisations) will be self-referential inasmuch as they dramatize the motion of separation/connection: a separation or distinct written creation which simultaneously connects by adapting certain improvisational patterns. Viewing these chapters (improvisations) through a wholly linear and rigidly complete form (i.e., a clear beginning, middle, and end), one will miss the circular or radial form. Hence, the term "free form" does not literally mean "lacking form;" instead it intends to evoke certain similarities with the jazz free form movement of the sixties. This musical form organically grew out of the improvisation itself instead of existing a priori—that is, the preestablished 32-bar song form or the 12-bar blues form, each including a set combination of chord changes, was rejected in favor of giving equal improvisatory freedom to those musicians who heretofore merely accompanied the soloists. Without the clearly marked sections of a 32-bar form, many free form pieces sought unity through the development of melodic motives. Such improvisations exponentially multiplied creative possibilities

because one was not compelled to make the melodies fit the predetermined and repeated chord progressions. With this expanded spectrum, a free form piece, despite its liberation from the bar form's harnessing of time into a finite realm of completion via the order of equal measure lengths, becomes just that: a "piece," a naturally unfinished attempt to enter the infinite realm of the impulse. In other words, every time a particular free form song consisting of recognizable motives is played, it constitutes an entirely new performance which nevertheless may include similarities with other performances. To be fair, each improvisation on a given 32-bar song can be a new performance as well, depending upon the imaginative capabilities of the improviser. The primary difference is the fact that a free form improvisation achieves a closer affiliation with the divine motion/mystery itself by creating different moods.

In short, the first chapter will constitute a free form improvisation, basing its far-reaching explorations on three principal themes—the divine impulse-generated circle of separation/connection, the improviser's willful surrender to this circle, and the Faustian separation's postmodern culmination which rejects/fears this circle. This first improvisation (chapter) will differ from the following two improvisations (chapters) in its emphasis on rhythmic heterogeneity and will be an attempt to represent a piece of the infinitely different cycles of divine motion. In so doing, several moods or colors will spin around the aforesaid themes in such a way as to disrupt the linear convention of introduction, body, and conclusion. By contrast, the second improvisation (chapter) will develop these themes via a single mood, focusing on separating/connecting with other thinkers. The final improvisation (third chapter) will focus on the difference between representative examples of jazz and grunge rock. The thesis (performance) will conclude/begin with a self-referential exploration, an improvised re-creation of the psyche's intense voyage during an improvisation.

The First Improvisation

Improvising on the Book of Genesis

The impulse is God, and together they are one with motion: an impulse charged with assertion and beaming with confidence, always doubly selfish/selfless, always an electrically-felt alignment of the triadic orbits—the physical, the intellectual, and the spiritual. How incredible it must have been for the first humans upon discovering communication. Those humans who first separated/connected with the impulse by making onomatopoeic sounds—echoes unwittingly, yet willfully, reflecting their environment—are the distant ancestors of the postmodern improviser. The primary difference is that the true improviser must endure years of intense study and practice before the impulse is found, whereas one might speculate that early humans naturally achieved this heightened state by virtue of recognizing their place in an environment they did not create. They lived in an environment dominated by the impulse, as opposed to the postmodern improviser, who lives in an environment dominated by the mass media.

This divine motion is too swift for any one man-made statement which tries to capture and domesticate its essence. Clearly, this is impossible since humans inhabit a finite realm wherein their words are even more ephemeral. Language, however imperfect, can nevertheless offer praise to this deity only by accepting its motion; one cannot fight against the current; rather, one must learn to become a distinct, yet indistinct, water molecule moving with the river because it is the river. One thinks of the novelist experiencing the story telling itself, or the improviser willfully allowing the melody to direct itself.

This heightened state charged with assertion and beaming with confidence becomes a plausible goal everytime the true improviser performs. By exercising the mind to make crucial decisions every measure, one reaches a point where the motion of the groove takes over. Here the intellectual aspect of improvisation gives way to the spiritual. The divine motion gives the improviser a glimpse into the infinite, and in doing so, the improviser plays things he never knew he could play. Instead of consciously anticipating an interval to focus on for a particular chord in the forthcoming measure, his perception separates from this conscious process and reconnects by beholding the motion moving him. In this spiritual ecstasy the improviser formulates thoughts analogous to the improvisation—many of which are developed in this thesis.

The fall occurs when Satan seduces the intellect to separate from the spiritual motion, thinking it can survive without making that separation simultaneously a reconnection. Satan, however, closed the deal a long time ago when Faust fell for that deceptive promise which asserts the self-sufficiency of reason, the ignorantly dangerous substitution of the model as reality itself. In *The Transparent Society*, Gianni Vattimo states that

Heidegger showed that to think of being as foundation, and reality as a rational system of causes and effects, is simply to extend the model of ‘scientific’ objectivity to the totality of being. All things are reduced to the level of pure presences that can be measured, manipulated, replaced and therefore easily dominated and organized—and in the end man, his interiority and historicity are all reduced to the same level. (8)

Thus, the impulse of God is rejected in favor of the continuous growth of wealth. Man does not want to listen to the original rhythm whose spontaneous sparks defy the safe, efficient, and predictable leveler of mechanization. It is no coincidence that the computer is organized through the binary system of ones and zeros—fundamentally, an arrangement

representing man's denial of the interrelationship of life and death. The elusive, triadic space or motion which merges these two into one is forgotten. Instead, the illogically logical man prefers a mechanical life of his own making, a battery-operated existence devoted to the cancerous proliferation of profit. Just as the shopping mall's interior neutralizes the death and renewed life of the seasons, so does man reject the merging extremes of improvisatory motion: the constant death of ideas provides fertile soil for the birth of new ones. In completing the incomplete binary model not "for" but indeed "as" new and improved life, the Faustian man's rigorously-conditioned urge for the trivialized salvation of the one (money) is quite compatible with the zero or the will to nothingness so aptly conveyed through much of grunge rock.

The Faustian Frankenstein Monster's Postmodern Children

To be sure, the modern history of Western civilization involves the Faustian hubris of gratuitous separation. This separation—or amputation, since it lacks the necessary connection—causes the nihilistic tendencies of many youth today only because it is deified via the incessant bombardment of slogans and images. In a curious variation on the theme, Adam evicts himself from Paradise in the deluded belief that his technological paradise will be far superior. In other words, since the Renaissance, the increased energy devoted to science and its inventions plus the successful development of capitalistic power based on money and information instead of land has rigidly and excessively ordered the so-called first world countries; it has re-created its environment in its own uniquely human, and therefore uniquely flawed, image; the fruit has ignorantly divorced itself from the tree in favor of a virtual tree.

What may very well be the most dangerous and potentially fatal aspect of our postmodern realm is its successful creation of a stifling environment driven by irrational rationality. Since this environment (skyscrapers, traffic, parking lots, and neon signs, etc.,

not to mention the hyperreal quality of image and slogan proliferation) is totally man-made and almost total in its influence on consciousness, the other non-man-made realm is obscured. Its vital message is lost under the bedlam and dross of most popular music, a great deal of political rhetoric, and any advertiser's claim. In fact, a surprising number of Americans, for fear of giving their subconscious a chance to consider this Faustian separation, keep the flow of man-made noise going as long as possible. This same fear explains why many joggers at the local park use a Sony Walkman to prevent the silent truth of trees and grass from seeping into their consciousness. Moreover, the postmodern late-capitalist ideology enforces the fallacious denial of death whereby renewal becomes impossible.

The knowledge that has been obscured still survives in the genuine act of improvisation. The intuitive knowledge that early man knew by virtue of being in a particular environment he did not create entails the continuing motion of separation and connection. Everywhere, early man saw evidence of this from the cycle of seasons to the cycle of life and death. That is, reality was circular or triadic: the constant movement of separation and connection allowed one to see both simultaneously as one instead of as a logocentrist seeing them as irreconcilable opposites. Hence, the magical three is that which reconciles the two with one. Each separation is really a connection on another level.

By contrast, many members of generation X manifest a will to nothingness (i.e., a will to nothing beyond their fleeting media-driven narcissistic desires) simply because their ability to separate and connect is hindered. Consequently, they cannot release the alienated energies of improvisation. In fact, their impotent and desperately nihilistic energies as reflected in grunge anti-music are justifiable inasmuch as the older generations have very little knowledge regarding the divine motion to give them, only empty commodities; there is no significant rite of passage for youth today, only empty rituals. In other words, children are taught very early through the mass media that money and commodities are the sole

determinants of happiness. An extremely literal and cynically pragmatic ideology, which equates knowledge with a better job, is foisted upon them. Thus, the truth that knowledge can help one face struggle as well as achieve spiritual peace is ridiculed and relegated to a possession of the socially inferior nerd.

In short, their angst arises because they paradoxically identify with the source of their impotent misery. This detrimental identification should not be confused with early man's identification with his physical environment, for that was predicated on what truly is and was even before humanity (i.e., the divine motion) and, therefore, always will elude human knowledge. As a result of this identification, man is humbled and need not consider the illogical Faustian temptation. Conversely, the angry and frustrated protest against the rigid and unspontaneous man-made environment (including the regimented, hierarchical, and dubiously democratic workplace plus the culture industry's monopoly of leisure time) is always already implicated with that which it indignantly despises. This indignation appeared first in punk and now in the grunge rock movement. Indeed, the genuine rage the punker felt now has become packaged and contained, and consequently passive and self-pitying. The jaded and sarcastic weariness of grunge anti-musicians becomes all the more ponderous especially when their exhausted protest against the alienating system ironically is used to sustain the system by selling more records. Later, I shall explore this problem by specifically focusing on the implications of Kurt Cobain's suicide.

As the leader of the popular grunge band Nirvana, Cobain was quite adept at expressing, however unmusically, the feelings of generation X. Most importantly, he embodied the profitable music industry formula of the simulated musician/artist. In fact, his sincerity prevented him from continuing to play his limited industry-directed role. Despite his honesty, he was still just a travesty of a musician. In other words, his inability to separate/connect, his inability to develop intellectually and spiritually, not only endeared him to his similarly paralyzed audience but also made suicide appear to be the only

liberation. Again, one really cannot blame generation X, for the older generations—specifically the ruling corporate class—have given them nothing in the way of liberation: the development of the improvisatory energies.

Tracing the Faustian Separation to Its Postmodern Culmination

In order to establish the postmodern situation which influenced Kurt Cobain's desperate act and continues to reduce significantly the possibility for a myriad of unique improvisers from generation X, one must take a closer look at the Faustian separation. This separation initially dealt with two realms of human endeavor firmly in place by the end of the Renaissance. Over the last three or four centuries these two realms, capitalism and science, have combined their powers to the point where the fruit of their labor is anything but fruit. Fruit will die and then be reborn; the motion of God continues its mystery. In contrast, the progeny of capitalism and science includes the self-justifying stasis of machines which do not naturally die and decompose, thereby providing fertile soil: the bureaucracy with its historically unprecedented waste of paper, the mass media's excessive dependence on trivia disguised as "news" or democratic information for the informed citizen, the lucrative commodification of false needs, the smug corpulence of the entertainment industry fattened primarily by mediocrity labeled as "talent," and the staggering amounts of money invested in subliminal manipulation via advertising of those who can no longer separate and connect—who can no longer improvise their own lives—above all, who are numb to the fact that they are expendable skin cells on the clumsy, mechanical body of postmodern ideology.

We have traveled a great distance in the evolution of civilization: from the imaginatively idealized people created by God, who re-created their environment and each other through the improvisation of language and its intersection with the triadic motion/mystery, to that disappointing majority of people created by the man-made Faustian

separation. They cannot re-create, only parrot. We can all love Big Brother now, or can we? I think not, because the peculiar type of neurotic anxiety and especially the defeatist despair and impotent nihilism of many generation Xers is evidence supporting the failure of postmodern America's specific brand of commodified democracy. This failure verifies the necessity of that obscured knowledge the improviser practices by simply living every day out of the death of yesterday. This improvised life differs greatly from daily pushing the boulder up the hill amidst the congested traffic of others doing the same thing.

In short, how could the rich banker financing a voyage to the New World or the scientist experimenting with his machines have known that they would inscribe an immense, unremovable tattoo on the Western arm of the earth?—one characterized by a colorful mixture of simulations (ads, TV news, film, music, videos, billboards) designed to keep many people amused with novelty after novelty so they can go to their dreary day job in the morning. If something is not done soon, the entire world will one day come to resemble the body of a member of Guns and Roses.

Separating/Connecting Dante

Perhaps by looking back before the firm establishment of capitalism and science and considering certain relevant passages from Dante's *Inferno*, one will note a world-view in alliance with the improviser. It is, I deeply believe, one that is logically and ethically superior. I do not intend to imply that the medieval world with its plagues, despotic feudal lords, misguided crusades, interminable wars, and corrupt popes is preferable to ours. Rather, Dante's wisdom is similar to the improviser's since both accept the mysterious authority of something greater than themselves. This wisdom sharply contrasts with the postmodern authority which announces itself every time a clerk says: "I'm sorry, sir, but that's what the computer says," or a slight variation: "I'm terribly sorry. I would help if I could, but that is our company policy." In other words, one now finds oneself (but only if

one takes the time to find a solitary contemplative moment) within a man-made matrix, a new chain of being where the major stockholders reside under the aegis of the bloodless calculation of unlimited growth, a dead kind of growth precisely because it rejects death.

It is, therefore, useful to consider Dante's thoughts on fraud, the triadic and organic hierarchy of God, Nature, and Art, and the medieval usurer. This consideration will give the improviser an alternative paradigm: one which can be measured against the dominant paradigm wherein the decontextualized depthlessness of the mass media's simulations relegate the art of improvisation to obscurity. Furthermore, one may connect Dante's thoughts with the separation/connection theme in order to juxtapose this synthesis against the Faustian-directed postmodern age.

In Canto 11 of the *Inferno*, the guide, Virgil, instructs the pilgrim, Dante, concerning fraud:

[S]ince fraud belongs exclusively to man,
 God hates it more and, therefore, far below,
 the fraudulent are placed and suffer most. (25-27)

It is interesting to note that our age has witnessed what might prove to be the greatest fraud. The founding fathers, much less Dante, never could have anticipated the man-made, grafted branch of government: the mass media. The insidious and fraudulent nature of postmodern America is so formidable precisely because it exists at two levels which intersect in the mass media.

At one level, those twenty-three corporations which own an overwhelming majority of newspapers, magazines, and television networks always will abuse their power if it serves their financial interests. Hence, those who own the mass media, in effect, own an efficient smokescreen hiding their actions. (How many GE scandals have been reported on NBC?) Moreover, the fact that the slogan "less government" is pumped through these

“entertaining yet informative” networks of influence also is self-serving since this always means “more corporations governing.”

At the second level, the mass media’s ability not only to interpret reality but become reality is evidenced by its almost total monopoly of space and time. I do not intend to suggest that the mass media are categorically satanic and immediately should be expunged. Rather, since reality always is that which is interpreted, that which one distances yet identifies with, it is quite disturbing that the mass media continue to increase their omnipotent and ubiquitous interpretative power. That is, the mass media’s evolving extensions (i.e., the imperialistic subjugation of those intangible inner stimulants via the flourishing spectacle of commodified happiness and well-being found in most commercials) are inversely proportional to the devolving internal capacities of those who solely depend upon its information. An incredible number of American people have repressed the improvisational instinct. But who can blame them? They innocently trust the self-serving claims which repeatedly occur throughout the mass media: “We keep you informed and up-to-date with the crucial matters shaping our world today” and “You can trust us (show image of American flag and play awe-inspiring patriotic music) because we help you to increase your democratic freedoms, thereby allowing you to make informed decisions which significantly shape the course of the nation.” Clearly, this is fraud of the highest order.

Ultimately, this fraud is the natural progression of a presumptuously unnatural premise: the Faustian separation. The more the reductively interpretative machines of reality tattoo themselves on a landscape which existed long before man ever did, the more they constitute an enveloping vacuum which either excludes or reduces anything that does not fit the rigidly efficient, repetitive, and profit-generating form. Consequently, all the potential energy that stimulates the powers of reflection, that prompts one’s innate desire for self-creation, is left dormant. I am not demanding that every single person must

become an artistic or philosophical genius. I am stating only that the natural impulse to “help thyself” or “know thyself” should not be confused with the ideologically-directed or subliminally-commanded consumer impulse to buy a self-help book.

Historically, this reductive interpretation of reality is nothing new, since civilizations have always tried to unify large groups of people through a dominant ideology. The primary differences today are the mass media’s ability to separate and connect randomly within a growing realm that already has been amputated from the original source (i.e., the divine impulse-driven natural environment) of early man’s interpretative improvisations; also, the mass media then take those private spaces, once dominated by individuals living prior to the ubiquitous postmodern tentacles of television, radio, magazines, and newspapers, and fill them with ideology designed to keep people in a shopping mall feeding-frenzy. The former difference is a mutated caricature of the improviser’s separation/connection process, precisely because the spontaneous realm of the impulse is ignored. Indeed, the exact opposite is the case. As a direct development of the synthesis of science and capitalism, the content of every advertisement is meticulously fabricated, often with manipulative details. Moreover, this constant separation/connection, best described as pastiche, especially dominates the ads on television as well as most music videos (which are really advertisements too).

Advertising, the epitome of the latter difference, probably has become the greatest evolving force of postmodernism (from the minute sophistication of each ad to its expansive capitalistic nature), and those most susceptible to its burgeoning influence are those least developed intellectually. The historically unprecedented tragedy of generation X lies in its quickly disappearing capacity to relax into infinite motion’s outer-directed atmosphere—an atmosphere that knows no form except for those ephemeral human-directed improvisations.

The potential disaster of science and capitalism's offspring is the creation of a form that refuses to decompose itself in favor of the new impulse-directed form. Since this dead form continues to live, potential individuals must give up the inner exploration; they must ignore the impulse by buying more things, which simultaneously makes the unarticulated, dormant impulse even more bothersome and begins the regressive cycle once again (i.e., one buys more in hopes of silencing the original and unknown impulse). This regressive cycle is a travesty of early man's improvisatory circle; it is the anti-matter of the human-generated, outer-stimulated matter, much like the postmodern caricature of separation/connection, i.e., pastiche.

To be sure, a significant historical parallel is occurring now. Just as many people sold their farms to the entrepreneurial capitalists during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and moved to work in the city factories, so, too, have many people, especially generation Xers, sold the uncultivated soil of consciousness and moved to the crowded and synthetic cities of the mediascape.

One might idealistically imagine that the tribal beginnings of civilization contained many artists—that is, practically everybody approached their hunting or food-gathering as something spiritually integrated. One lived in a realm of vital external objects. One lived among the ghosts of one's ancestors as well. However, the more the tribe separated and connected within itself, thereby increasing the specialization of daily work, the more essential was the need for a tribal priest or shaman. The priest's specialized task involved maintaining the connection between the increasing complexity of civilization, due to man's designation of tools and later, machines, and the larger realm from which man originates and returns. Furthermore, the priest derived his knowledge from visions; hence, the impulse directed his imaginative excursions; the impulse guided the form.

During the medieval reign of the Roman Catholic Church, the static form already had begun to strengthen itself and to prepare its mutiny against the impulse. The councils

that codified the books of the Bible and the powerful ritual of the Latin Mass, which unified many Europeans, were simply the steps leading to the totalizing sign of hyperreality that deifies the sterile form of nihilism in which nothing exists beyond the profit motive. Of course, as the medieval city's hierarchy of power attained more divisions, thereby increasing the tentacles of societal relations, the spiritual realm's horizon could still be seen. The artist could still maintain that integral connection with the non-man-made realm, especially in the great cathedrals; nevertheless the impulse was becoming obscured.

Certainly, the master artist is able, by definition, to make the form serve the impulse. For example, Dante hears the eternal sounds filtered through his imaginative reflections of his unique experience and environment. In fact, Dante expresses the basic triadic unity of the improviser, a unity which encompasses the inner impulse to separate/connect. In Canto 11 of the *Inferno*, Virgil instructs the pilgrim, Dante, thus:

“Philosophy,” he said, “and more than once,
 points out to one who reads with understanding
 how Nature takes her course from the Divine
 Intellect, from its artistic workmanship;
 and if you have your *Physics* well in mind
 you will find, not many pages from the start,
 how your art too, as best it can, imitates
 Nature, the way an apprentice does his master;
 so your art may be said to be God's grandchild.
 From Art and Nature man was meant to take
 his daily bread to live—if you recall
 the book of Genesis near the beginning;
 but the usurer, adopting other means,
 scorns Nature in herself and in her pupil,
 Art—he invests his hope in something else.” (97-111)

Clearly, this passage not only describes, by implication, a medieval world that was still largely agrarian but also one which valued the artist's role in celebrating the divine mystery. In other words, the artist separated himself from that which he observed in order to reflect upon the mysterious source which created both himself and the object observed. Hence, his materialized reflection or reconnection, whether embodied on a canvas, in a book, or by an invisible and spontaneous arrangement of sounds, is charged with a kind of willful participation in divinity. Moreover, one experiences the same motion deity behind the minute, interactive complexity of atoms, molecules, and cells, or in the incredibly immense realm of galaxies, only by the constant exertion of the intellect joined with great physical stamina. In short, this passage reflects a triadic paradigm (God, Nature, Art) that has been overturned by the postmodern usurer who "invests his hope" in nothing beyond the evolving sophistication of the profit-propelling corporate oligarchy.

Later, I will build upon these relationships by specifically concentrating on the essential revival of the impulse directing the form which developed as a reaction against the evolving tentacles of the twentieth century man-made realm. This reaction was best expressed in jazz music, which provides an excellent comparison with the futile implications of grunge rock. Moreover, all of these manifestations must be examined in the context of the postmodern atmosphere, which reveals the excessive, consciousness-molding aspects of science and capitalism's ubiquitous offspring: hyperreality.

The Second Improvisation

To develop the improviser's self-definition (which is diametrically opposed to the popular generation X preference for the suffocating tendencies of postmodernism over the willfully generated mastery of separation/connection), it is necessary to consider the modernist beginnings of mass media criticism. Such a consideration will establish a foundation from which one may trace the postmodern culmination of the dead form or the accelerated Faustian separation back to those who have contributed important explanations on the capitalistic or monopolistic power struggle behind the mass media, the scientifically deliberate manipulation in subliminal advertising, and the similar worlds of hyperreality, the simulacrum, and technopoly. All of these themes will enrich my own argument regarding the inability to separate/connect—that is, the ignorance of the non-man-made motion and of its most eloquent spokesman, the improviser.

To begin, one might consider Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin observes that "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (574). In the third improvisation (chapter), I will build on this idea by focusing on how the postmodern technique of mechanical reproduction has become so pervasive that it has replaced the authentic artistic object with the empty simulation. Specifically, the music industry's monopolistic stranglehold, which prevents authentic talent from being marketed to mass audiences, manifests itself in the simulated grunge musician's enslavement to the rigid order of 4/4. In any case, the improviser's continual impulse-driven evolution of form is entirely at odds with the rigid formula of musical sameness reproduced ad nauseum.

Benjamin also notes that this substitution of a “plurality of copies for a unique existence” finds its “most powerful agent” (574) in film. This observation is significant because in the nearly sixty years since Benjamin published this essay, the hypnotic fascination associated with viewing the two-dimensional illusion of moving images has, if anything, increased, due to the visual sophistication of the medium. At the same time, however, a kind of jaded apathy may result: one is too “cool” to get enthusiastic or passionate about something, especially if that something exists outside of the expanding vacuum of the mass media (for example, a library or the jazz section in a record store).

Once again, one may attribute this to one’s inability to separate/connect. Many generation Xers no longer value the search for meaning either because they wholeheartedly and unconsciously assimilate and emulate the proliferation of images and slogans in finding a pseudo-self-definition; or perhaps they sense the overwhelming falsity of advertising by emptying practically everything of meaning through commodification, but are too lazy or too nihilistic to believe that they can transcend the cynicism of postmodernism. In fact, the more one fails to respond to that natural inclination or impulse to learn and consequently exercise and constantly re-create one’s unique existence, the more one closely identifies with that which is reproduced. In another important passage Benjamin speaks rather prophetically about this situation by noting that the “reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels” emphasizes “transitoriness,” which can discourage one’s vital need to separate/connect with the “unique object” (575). It follows that the more one focuses on the “reproduction,” the more one tends to forget about the “aura” of the “unique object.” Benjamin observes a significant effect of this preference for the “reproduction” as it relates to one’s overall notion of reality: “The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception” (575).

This process of “unlimited scope,” due to the enormous energy invested in building a new world upon the initial Faustian separation, has created a historically unprecedented realm where the omnipresent mass media is not content merely with the “adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality.” The ruling class hiding behind the mass media, either consciously or unconsciously, have focused their marketing strategies in order to condition or propagandize the American population into accepting a new reality based on a fraudulent, man-made mythology wherein personal struggle is replaced with a desire to win the state lottery. In other words, Benjamin’s aura (which defines the mysterious distance one feels from a natural landscape or a masterful art work) is replaced by a mirage. One endlessly chases a mass-advertised fantasy in the futile hope of escaping the dreary dehumanization of one’s day job. But this situation is simply the ruling class’s reinterpretation of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Other commentators from the modernist period have made similar observations which build upon Benjamin’s theme of the decaying aura versus the flourishing motion picture. In an essay entitled “The End of Reason,” Max Horkheimer deals with the decaying aspirations of the individual against the modern embodiment of reason found in a highly operational and quantified bureaucracy. According to Horkheimer, this process strips reason of its contemplative possibilities since almost every logical thought must serve a practical and efficient short-term goal. In a passage which echoes Benjamin’s phrase, “to pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura” (575), Horkheimer speaks of the “skeptical separation of thought from its object” (31). He notes that “economic reality” causes “all things” to be measured by a monetary standard (31). Horkheimer continues:

In the face of such levelling, the proper being of the object is no longer taken into account. Cognition thus becomes that which registers the objects and proceeds to interpret the quantified expressions of them. The less human beings think of reality in qualitative terms, the more susceptible

reality becomes to manipulation. Its objects are neither understood nor respected. (31)

The extremely undemocratic offspring of science and capitalism was firmly in place when Benjamin and Horkheimer wrote these essays in 1936 and 1941, respectively. The technology which brings images ready-made to the viewer can, if unquestioned, encourage that viewer to accept them as final or completely formed in an ontological sense. If that viewer thinks a modern newsreel or a postmodern television news segment is actually reality as filtered through a medium, rather than an interpretation of reality designed by certain people with vested interests, then the democratic ideal of the informed citizen is in danger. It is one thing to accept a segment of moving images as real, as final, complete, unquestioned, but it is a much more serious blow to the informed citizen-ideal (that is, the individual who can separate/connect) when the distance of which Benjamin speaks becomes so completely erased that one orders one's so-called "individual self" according to the moving image. This fate, which is now a matter of course in the postmodern realm, was first clearly identified by Marshall McLuhan. In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan compares this phenomenon to the Greek myth of Narcissus, whose "extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image" (51). McLuhan elaborates:

With the arrival of electric technology, man extended, or set outside himself, a live model of the central nervous system itself. To the degree that this is so, it is a development that suggests a desperate and suicidal autoamputation, as if the central nervous system could no longer depend on the physical organs to be protective buffers against the slings and arrows of outrageous mechanism. It could well be that the successive mechanizations of the various physical organs since the invention of printing have made too

violent and superstimulated a social experience for the central nervous system to endure. (53)

Today, that “extended or repeated image” cannot be directly traced to the narcissist precisely because an additional amputation has occurred. In other words, the astronomical proliferation of images no longer contains a meaningful referent. Consequently, one’s inability to generate meaning based on one’s connection with the divine impulse—that which created him—is reduced to obscurity since one’s “spirituality” becomes redefined by the ubiquity of images. This concept of simulations or hyperreality, first designated by Jean Baudrillard, is the grand finale of Benjamin’s decaying aura—now completely dead to many generation Xers—and McLuhan’s exteriorized central nervous system. In *Simulacra and Simulations*, as excerpted in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Baudrillard explains:

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. (166)

This decaying “territory” accounts for the impotent rage one finds in the lyrics and especially in the anti-musical implications of grunge rock. Here I must vehemently reiterate the fraud that has been committed: the long, intermingling paths of science and capitalism traveled since the initial Renaissance development of the Faustian separation have led to the domain of the postmodern “usurer,” who would surely surpass Dante’s medieval one by the former’s sheer perfection or totality of the fraud (one’s fraud via hyperreality becomes

true, good, and right). Hyperreality has become the Faustian separation's birth of the seeming impervious and eternal dead form. Nevertheless, its ideological supremacy is questioned whenever a real problem of impotent rage, anxiety, and desperation fails to be assuaged by a simulation (e.g., Kurt Cobain's situation leading to his suicide).

Unfortunately, precisely because this rage never disappears, it perversely is used to fuel more simulations. One unconsciously commits an Orwellian reversal (i.e., War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength) by escaping from the sometimes frightening freedom of the divine impulse to the speed cycle of commodity comfort; one loves one's source of misery because that is all one knows. This ironic escape is understandable since the incoherent and fragmented influence of the media can prevent one (especially one who already hates knowledge or curiosity by associating it with the boredom of school) from patiently tracing the problem's foundation. Moreover, through the pastiche of television, radio, and newspapers, the mass media discourage not only a generation Xer's fundamental need for integrated meaning but also, through the frantic pace of every ten- to thirty-second ad, the ability to appreciate the silence and deep relaxation needed for intellectual and spiritual development. Hence, the postmodern situation for generation X is quite grim because the older generation in power cannot see beyond the all-encompassing mechanism of increasing profits every quarter; that is, they can view generation X only as a vulnerable audience for their products. Thus, the exorbitant amounts of money invested in advertising bombards generation X, whose physical vigor, intellectual idealism, and spiritual curiosity, endemic to every young generation, is left undeveloped in favor of imitating this cynicism. Moreover, the cynical rejection of these three potential stimulants to growth, or the denial of the improvisatory state of becoming, becomes a "cool" pose when grunge anti-musicians establish this as a lifeless model to be imitated. McLuhan's narcissist is now the young postmodern narcissist whose subconscious, non-man-made, and primal desire to channel the impulse is replaced by the man-made fantasies wherein

products represent salvation and happiness, and wherein the dreary reaction of grunge itself becomes a product affirming its oppressor.

Concerning this amputation from the real, this descent into the hyperreal, Arthur Kroker and David Cook in *The Postmodern Scene* characterize one highly prominent aspect of the mass media—television:

Our general theorisation is . . . that TV is the real world of postmodern culture which has *entertainment* as its ideology, the *spectacle* as the emblematic sign of the commodity-form, *lifestyle advertising* as its popular psychology, pure, empty *seriality* as the bond which unites the simulacrum of the audience, *electronic images* as its most dynamic, and only, form of social cohesion, *elite media politics* as its ideological formula, the buying and selling of *abstracted attention* as the locus of its marketplace rationale, *cynicism* as its dominant cultural sign, and the diffusion of a *network of relational power* as its real product. (270)

In response to this passage, an additional development concerning a generation Xer's fragmented or unexplored psyche must be considered. A great number of differences always arise naturally among all human beings regardless of a ubiquitous mass media. In fact, this seemingly infinite variety of differences gives eloquent evidence of their mysterious source. However, just as we are born unable to walk or speak but naturally acquire these abilities, so, too, may we willfully increase our natural curiosities, thereby adding another dimension of characteristics to those natural differences. The unique appearance and gait coupled with a peculiar attitude or emotional spectrum of actions and reactions found in every person should not be the end of one's development.

However, television's divorce from the real encourages one's divorce from one's unique source. The divine impulse guiding one's dreams becomes as incoherent and meaningless as the man-made dream (e.g., the "popular psychology" of "lifestyle

advertising”) guiding one’s choices at the mall. Consequently, the potential power of one’s conscious intellect atrophies due to mass media’s incessant celebration of serendipity over internal struggle. Inevitably, the improviser’s struggle (which is a superlative development of each person’s potential struggle) becomes ever more foreign and, in some cruelly ironic cases, contemptible. Understandably, this contemptibility or mere discomfort is a defense mechanism that the impulse-driven subconscious nevertheless recognizes despite the conscious failure to recognize the source of discomfort; the split between the conscious and subconscious prevents one from engaging the very same struggle the improviser daily welcomes. Hence, discomfort results, especially when the improviser’s subtle combination of sounds questions the media-induced conscious preference for smugness and the waste of internal energies.

For now, a return to Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is necessary in order to trace a crucial reversal dealing with one’s reaction to the phenomenon of moving images. In other words, the imperialistic expansion of the mass media involves a complex evolution, as Kroker and Cook note, which can encourage sarcastic and complacent apathy, which, in turn, opposes Benjamin’s original theorisation regarding film’s shock effect. In developing this reversal which accounts for the popularity of grunge, I will approach my discussion of the mass media from two perspectives: that of shortsighted and avaricious businessmen behind the media and that of criticizing the media’s man-made atmosphere. Furthermore, I will use this critique of the mass media as a foundation from which I will further establish my dichotomy between the generation X penchant for nihilism resulting from their ignorance of separation/connection, and the improviser’s willful struggle and relationship to the divine impulse.

First of all, Benjamin deals with the viewer’s reaction to film as opposed to a painting:

The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested. . . . The spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film, which, like all shocks, should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind. (585-586)

The postmodern devolution of this situation constitutes a double irony: neither have these shocks, for the most part, retained their original effect, nor have many spectators paid enough attention to achieve a "heightened presence of mind." Indeed, the exact opposite has occurred. The nihilistic generation Xer acclimates himself to these shocks (which recently have imploded any kind of temporal or spatial reference point, as seen in many MTV videos) and resides on a throne of boredom, gripping his scepter and wielding his power (originating not from an internal struggle but simply from a monetary investment) to increase the rate at which these images juxtapose themselves. In short, the shocks cease to shock due to their hyperreal amplification, and because this vertiginous velocity is antithetical to the slow and patient exercise needed to find the impulse, a "heightened presence of mind" is impossible. In *Fatal Strategies* as excerpted in *Jean Baudrillard Selected Writings*, Baudrillard elaborates on this paradox: "Motion does not disappear so much in immobility as it does in speed and acceleration, in what is more mobile than movement, so to speak, and which transports it to extremes while depriving it of meaning" (188). In a variation on the theme, Mark Crispin Miller in *Boxed In: The Culture of TV* also considers this reversal:

[It] is possible that no contrast, however violent, could jolt TV's overseasoned audience, for whom discontinuity, disjointedness are themselves the norm; a spectacle that no stark images could shatter, because

it comes already shattered. TV ceaselessly disrupts itself, not only through the sheer multiplicity of its offerings in the age of satellite and cable, but as a strategy to keep the viewer semihypnotized. Through its monotonous aesthetic of incessant change, TV may make actual change unrecognizable, offering, in every quiet living room, a cool parody of the Heraclitean fire.
(13-14)

As Neil Postman considers, the relentless repetition of various traditional symbols found in the rapid dizziness of the mediascape has a certain negative effect, which undoubtedly adds to the “monotonous aesthetic of incessant change.” In *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Postman speaks of the “trivialization of significant cultural symbols” (165). This trivialization is relevant to the physical, mental, and spiritual paralysis of many generation Xers inasmuch as it only strengthens the grip of the doubly amputated image: a Faustian Frankenstein monster whose overwhelming reduplication of itself in ads, TV sitcoms, and music videos unnoticeably enforces conformity from the soporific viewer who is deaf to the eternal motion. Postman embellishes further:

[T]he journey to meaninglessness of symbols is a function not only of the frequency with which they are invoked but of the indiscriminate contexts in which they are used. An obscenity, for example, can do its work best when it is reserved for situations that call forth anger, disgust, or hatred. When it is used as an adjective for every third noun in a sentence, irrespective of the emotional context, it is deprived of its magical effects and, indeed, of its entire point. This is what happens when Abraham Lincoln’s image, or George Washington’s, is used to announce linen sales on Presidents’ Day, or Martin Luther King’s birthday celebration is taken as an occasion for furniture discounts. It is what happens when Uncle Sam, God, or Jesus is

employed as an agent of the profane world for an essentially trivial purpose.
(167)

Separated from the circulation of separation/connection as well as split from the real (i.e., that environment which is organized and driven by something higher than a computer), the Faustian Frankenstein is a reversal of the original story's circumstances: instead of facing an ignorant and violent mob reacting against something strikingly humanlike, yet fearfully grotesque and unrelated to the mob's surroundings, the postmodern monster becomes the environment. To be sure, this environment predictably serves its owners despite the repeated message that the interests of the consumer are the most important. In fact, this lie is the first necessary step in securing the insidiously secret power of the corporate elite. As Michel Foucault states in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*:

Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. Would power be accepted if it were entirely cynical? For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation. Not only because power imposes secrecy on those whom it dominates, but because it is perhaps just as indispensable to the latter: would they accept it if they did not see it as a mere limit placed on their desire, leaving a measure of freedom—however slight—intact? (86)

In addition to inconspicuously showing its power by reducing a cultural symbol to the status of supporting the advertisements of products, the corporate elite behind advertising attempts to make its self-serving truths seem as natural as possible. In *The Age of Manipulation: The Con In Confidence, The Sin In Sincere*, Wilson Bryan Key builds on the passage by Foucault, specifically dealing with truth as defined by the Faustian Frankenstein model. Key states that “truths are manufactured to order; audience-perceived

realities are manipulated to appear as objective realities” (7). Moreover, he adds that “[media technicians] must disguise from audiences what they are doing. . . . Audiences are never permitted backstage; illusions are easily destroyed, and media illusions are worth a great deal of money” (7).

As any ad executive knows, another way to manipulate audiences is to emphasize continuously, yet subtly, the liberating effects of products as well as the unlimited number of products available, which is another aspect of the consumer’s so-called freedom. One always is reminded that every new product will save one more time and spare one the difficulty of having to use the intellect at all: for example, the repetition of the phrase “easy to use” in ads and also on product labels. The common theme for most ads, then, tends to contradict itself. Ads want the consumer to believe he is free, and yet since ads always intend to create or encourage a desire, the consumer is, by definition, inadequate; he is always lacking something. According to Andrei Codrescu in *The Muse Is Always Half-Dressed In New Orleans*, the characters in ads are never unhappy since they have all the products the consumer oppressively feels he must have as well. In a rather funny passage, Codrescu suggests the unending speed cycle which invariably leaves the consumer still inadequate:

The happy ones on TV, unlike us, are two-dimensional. Their purpose is to sow strife, discontent and revolution among us, the living. (If we are still!) If you are married TV makes you wish that you were single. If you are single TV makes you want to be part of that merry gang of your Lite-beer drinking peer group. If you are part of that merry gang, it makes you wish that you were the leader of it. If you are the leader of it, you don’t have a good enough car. If you have a good enough car, you’ll need a good enough woman (man). If you’ve got one of those you’ll need a better deoderant. If you smell good enough to be a couple you’ll need better

medicine for your headaches. If you entertain you'll need better class than your neighbors and have the coffee that'll prove it. And when at long last you lie on your happy marital bed having survived the insufficiencies of youth, same-sex bonding and the pitfalls of body image and body odor, you lie awake because you are sexually dysfunctional and need a therapist, an insurance agent, an accident lawyer, Rogaine for your hair, a good, caring hospital and mental institution to put your children in. And if you succeed at all this, don't be too cocky: you're still fat. (58-59)

Certainly, it is excessive enough to manipulate audiences through the rapid dizziness of explicit messages and images which play on amplified fears and insecurities, but this trick does not completely satisfy the Faustian separation's lust for increasing the dead growth of fabricated needs. Thus, the tremendous advances in psychological research—specifically, subliminal persuasion—have proven to be an excellent source of knowledge that can be abused for fraudulent purposes. Not unlike an odorless and invisible poisonous gas which fills an atmosphere, subliminal persuasion can be incorporated into the mediascape quite well. Moreover, its effectiveness is based on a crucial consumer attitude. As Wilson Bryan Key explains:

Population segments most susceptible to media management usually think they think independently, critically, clearly, and can readily discriminate between truth and falsity, reality and fantasy. The self-perception of autonomy is a basic indoctrinational [sic] priming tool. Humans who think they think for themselves often do not. (37)

In addition to describing this common consumer attitude, Key defines the unconscious as the “repository of more-or-less basic, enduring belief and attitude systems, cultural values, predispositions, and basic assumptions” (38). Key states that “unconsciously supported ideas are usually taken for granted” (38). Thus, “when

assumptions surface, they should always be questioned” (38). It should be noted that the ideal improviser constantly questions musical assumptions. The improviser’s acceptance of the divine motion entails the continuous evolution of form which involves an alert sense of self-monitoring. This vigilance is an integral part of the separation/connection process. Furthermore, the deeper the improviser explores, the more he can distinguish musical and non-musical assumptions. A closer look at this process will be the focus of the third improvisation (chapter); for now, it will suffice to assert the growing split between the improviser’s message and the average generation Xer’s ability to understand it. This split seems to be influenced and exacerbated by the blindingly-fast pace of short ads which undoubtedly reflect the vertigo-inducing MTV style where a different camera angle occurs every second. The more one adjusts one’s consciousness to this chaos, the further one gets away from the slow and organic continuity of meditation, of contemplation, of improvisation, and above all, of the relaxed state where one may question one’s unconscious assumptions.

Unfortunately, the fragmented nature of ads suits the avaricious motives of the corporate elite quite well, for this incoherent onslaught eventually becomes ostensibly natural, normal, and therefore, benign, once a viewer adjusts to it. When this process is accomplished, the corporate elite is able to engineer manipulative ads since the general audience will rarely question these ads. Mark Crispin Miller explains further:

Like propaganda generally, advertising must thus pervade the atmosphere; for it wants, paradoxically, to startle its beholders without really being noticed by them. Its aim is to jolt us, not “into thinking,” as in a Brechtian formulation, but specifically *away* from thought, into quasiautomatic action: “To us,” as an executive at Coca-Cola puts it, “Communication is *message assimilation*—the respondent must be shown to behave in some way that proves they [sic] have come to accept the message, not merely to have

received it.” This Paulovian [sic] (or Oceanic) project requires that “the respondent” not be confronted by the messages head-on and in an alien context, because so direct and vivid an approach might snap him out of his receptive trance and into an unprofitable meditation. (11)

Similarly, Wilson Bryan Key states that

Anyone who can relax via autohypnosis, meditation, or even through deep breathing, can learn consciously to discover subliminal content. In commercial uses of subliminals, however, the object is to prevent discovery. Readers are not supposed to discover genitalia in ad ice cubes. So tension is media-induced in numerous ways—data overload makes it difficult to focus upon any one portion of the perceptual experience, tension is intensified prior to commercial breaks on radio and television, and bad news (riots, wars, famines, violence, or scandals) is positioned adjacent to good news (advertising) in newspapers and magazines. (40)

Indeed, Benjamin himself would have been shocked by the “[absence] of mind” (585-586) that accompanies the popular generation X activity of “vegging” under the tube’s synthetic rays, which, via graphic sophistication, perversely separate/connect either randomly or deceptively. The continuous blur of juxtaposed images and frantic camera angles prove to be ideal for the advertiser’s fraud. Again, Key explains further:

Slow tachistoscopic cuts *can* be edited into film or videotape, and are extensively used in commercials and dramatic productions. They produce *quick cuts*, also called *metacontrast* or *backward masking*. Quick cuts are consciously visible but are masked by the next quick cut or attention-diverting continuity. Masked cuts are subliminal because they cannot be recalled, but their information will have a lingering effect upon audience perception, not unlike posthypnotic suggestion. . . .The quick cut, followed

by a diversion, plants an emotional predisposition or feeling without the audience being aware of precisely why they experienced that emotion. (21)

This fraud becomes all the more final when one notes the disturbing Orwellian reversals at work. Corporations always mask their massive media machine under the guise of “freedom,” and those who surrender their attention to this machine sincerely gravitate toward simulations, mistaking them for reality. The basic premise upon which their will to nothingness festers is their innocent belief in the possibility of living without intellectual and spiritual struggle. Of course, this ignorance can be traced back to the Faustian separation. By denying the motion of opposites, or in the improviser’s case, the circulation of the emanating impulses from the center (each present moment) out toward the elastic form and back again, one ceases to live. Kurt Cobain was honest enough to sense this, but lacked the confidence and enormous energy to chip slowly away at the petrified skin of his simulated self. Since he was so close to death metaphorically, the shorter route to freedom was obvious.

As is to be expected, the media could only interpret this suicide with a predictable reversal. MTV, itself a noteworthy pioneer in the simulation-generating field, will never understand the depth of Cobain’s despair. Hence, this depth was reversed and turned into a simulation designed solely to generate profit: for example, the cynically clever marketing of the MTV unplugged program featuring Cobain with his band Nirvana. If Cobain’s audience truly understood the source of that despair, they, too, would be faced with the same dilemma upon sensing the emptiness of their simulated minds: “Should I attempt to revive the now-shriveled capacity to receive the impulse or despair and kill myself?”

Is it any wonder that too many generation Xers have been reduced to absent shells of wasted potential? The exorbitant amounts of money devoted to convincing a young generation Xer, just entering pre-school or first grade, to be irrationally drawn to a specific brand of clothing, to cite just one example, represents the selfish greed and dangerous

shortsightedness of the older generations in power. In a passage from *Culture, Inc.* which echoes the culmination of the Faustian separation, Herbert Schiller states:

Whether the United States has a postindustrial service or information economy, it unmistakeably has a “gluteconomy.” Given the unfilled elemental needs of a large part of the American population, to say nothing of the desperate human condition of at least half of humanity, the idea of “glut” is grotesque if not obscene. However, in the prevailing economic order, its existence is a reminder that profit, not need, continues to be the determinant of economic activity. (158)

In short, the cycle of life and death is denied in favor of sustaining the proliferation of an object, an abstraction, i.e., money. The irony lies in the fact that the system created out of this single premise, i.e., hyperreality, seems to enthrall most generation Xers. From an essay written in 1977, Stanley Aronowitz speaks of the students from the pre-MTV era:

Most students go through their classes as if in a dream. They are bemused by daily interaction as if *it* were the unreality. Many of them live for the spectacle of the television show, the rock concert, the record party, and other mass-cultural activities. The spectacle appears as the real world in which they wake up and participate in the process of living; their nonmedia life is the fiction. (469)

This passage is even truer for today’s students. Indeed, one notes the addition of music videos as well as MTV’s recent efforts to increase its influence on a generation Xer’s consciousness. MTV’s power expands when almost every issue or activity must be reinterpreted via an empty profit-generating simulation: for example, MTV’s lame attempt to be politically aware, “Rock the Vote,” MTV game shows, MTV sports, etc. Yet another reversal appears in the inane simulation attempting to offer a dramatic, serious, and informative look at generation Xers ominously entitled “The Real World” which offers an

oversimplified view of generation Xer life. Herein lies the homogenizing power of simulations on which Mark Crispin Miller elaborates:

For it is not only *on* TV that TV thus proceeds to cancel selves; it also wields its nullifying influence out in the wide world of its impressionable viewers. Television's formal erasure of distinctness complements—or perhaps has actually fostered—a derisive personal style that inhibits all personality, a knowingness that now pervades all TV genres and the culture which those genres have homogenized. The corrosive irony emanating from the Oceanic elite has been universalized by television, whose characters—both real and fictional—relentlessly inflict it on each other and themselves, defining a negative ideal of hip inertia which no living human being is able to approach too closely. For example, in situation comedies or “sitcoms”—TV's definitive creation—the “comedy” almost always consists of a weak, compulsive jeering that immediately wipes out any divergence from the indefinite collective standard. The characters vie at self-containment, reacting to every simulation of intensity, every bright idea, every mechanical enthusiasm with the same deflating look of jaded incredulity. (325)

This “deflating look of jaded incredulity” becomes a popular pose for the grunge anti-musician. Moreover, Wilson Bryan Key adds to the concept of a “negative ideal of hip inertia” by discussing the mass media's celebration of mediocrity:

Pandering to public approval, ad media view outstanding intelligence as abnormal. Intelligence must be made to appear stupid. Stupidity is often celebrated as outstanding intelligence. The confused, impractical intellectual is a well-published and broadcast stereotype. Moral individuals are likewise

regarded as simpletons. Nonentities become models of virtue. Those who struggled toward new truths are viewed as naive or seditious. (253)

One thinks of the popular MTV show “Beavis and Butthead.” Even more ominously significant than MTV’s “The Real World,” this show is a cartoon: a twice removed simulation. These misfits clearly illustrate Miller’s “corrosive irony” which characterizes the “negative ideal of hip inertia.” Moreover, their “stupidity” is “celebrated” as “cool,” resulting in some generation Xers dressing up as Beavis and Butthead for Halloween. Above all, in a self-referential style typically postmodern, they reflect and reinforce the very behavior which keeps the show, or any television show, on the air: Beavis and Butthead frequently sit on a couch, watch music videos, and alternately make fun of these videos or grunt/laugh in jaded amusement. The range of their critical faculty is starved to the point where the underfed remains constitute monosyllabic extremes. The solipsistic pseudo-judgment of either “cool” or “sucks” represents a rather unfortunate turn in the quality of generation X discourse, if it can be called that. For those far too many youth who reflect the Beavis and Butthead simulated model, life becomes a wearisome, unending, hallucinogenic trip dominated by the manic extremes of spectacle-driven instant euphoria and nihilistic-driven inner apathy, boredom, or anxiety. Hence, the will to separate/connect, never having been developed, becomes an absence which is then filled by the mediascape.

To put it in Baudrillard’s terms, hyperreality involves the “cunning genius of the object, in the ecstatic form of the pure object, and in its victorious strategy over the subject” (185). This spectacle-driven instant euphoria is without lasting effects, because there ceases to be a fruitful circulation between the inside and the outside. The integrated internal structure of the emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual energies disappears because real struggle gives way to the escape—now an integral part of the supply and demand system of postmodern America—found in the channeling of desires toward the

prepackaged, no-assembly-required nature of commodified answers: witness the increasing popularity of television religion, psychic hotlines, and infomercials. As Baudrillard explains:

We have become completely absorbed by models, completely absorbed by fashion, completely absorbed by simulation. . . . Hence we move to the form of ecstasy. Ecstasy is that quality specific to each body that spirals in on itself until it has lost all meaning, and thus radiates as pure and empty form. Fashion is the ecstasy of the beautiful: the pure and empty form of a spiraling aesthetics. Simulation is the ecstasy of the real. To prove this, all you need to do is watch television, where real events follow one another in a perfectly ecstatic relation, that is to say through vertiginous and stereotyped traits, unreal and recurrent, which allow for continuous and uninterrupted juxtapositions. (187)

Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* speaks of the “random cannibalization of all the styles of the past” and “the play of random stylistic allusion” found in postmodern architecture and similar to television’s “continuous and uninterrupted juxtapositions.” Moreover, he notes:

[T]he culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced, a society of which Guy Debord has observed, in an extraordinary phrase, that in it “the image has become the final form of commodity reification” (*The Society of the Spectacle*. [Detroit, 1977]). (18)

In closing, I want to reiterate that the power behind this lucrative production of simulations is the corporate elite. Regarding the consequences of this concentration of economic power, Ben Bagdikian comments in *The Media Monopoly*:

When the same corporations expand their control over many different kinds of media, they speak glowingly of providing richer public choices in news and entertainment. But the experience has been that the common control of different media makes those media more alike than ever. Movies become more like television series. Cable, once thought to be a fundamental alternative to programs on commercial television but now under control of companies also in television and other media, is increasingly an imitation of commercial television. (7)

Of course, this homogeneity is understandable since it is easier to run a corporation when its products assume a uniform nature. One may then focus on ways to reproduce this safe and predictable formula. Herbert Schiller in *Culture, Inc.* elaborates on the avaricious corporate desire to homogenize America:

What is the significance of this awesome concentration of private cultural power? For one thing, it means that only the richest groups, nationally and internationally, can afford to own media-informational companies. What follows from this is that these holdings are the means for transmitting the thinking and the perspectives of the dominant, though tiniest, stratum of the propertied class, not only in news but also in entertainment and general cultural product. (40)

In *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, Douglas Kellner deals with another serious consequence of the corporate monopoly:

Democracy has thus clearly become subordinate to capitalism in the current system of commercial broadcasting. In an advanced industrial/technological order, access to the means of public communication is necessary to ensure that adequate presentation of various points of view and debate can take place. However, in a capitalist society where the means of communication

are concentrated in powerful corporations, the access of minority, oppositional, or alternative views is denied or limited. (94)

The improviser, too, finds himself in this antagonistic environment. Nevertheless, he will continue his struggle and pity the Faustian blindness of the corporations that conditions the blindness of many generation Xers who cherish the bolted embrace of simulations.

The Third Improvisation

The postmodern march of 4/4 is the march of mental slavery, the collapsed distinction between the subject and object, the elimination of Benjamin's aura and its vital distance which stimulates the primordial desire to separate/connect. The complete deracination of the evolving motion's rhythmic difference has given way to the music industry's homogenized creation of simulated rebellion. This simulated rebellion contains an unseen depth even though it is never shown. Reality for the average generation Xer is often merely visual and rarely inferred, actively sought, or creatively reconstituted. The crowded cacophany of decontextualized images and slogans fills a generation Xer's mind, conditioning him or her to be unable to separate/connect these simulations from their reversed source. One is blind to the fact that these simulations of rebellion are fundamentally rituals of unwitting acceptance: one's involuntary reflex to "crank up" the volume of a favorite grunge anti-song reveals one's desire to let as many people as possible know one's perversely celebratory surrender to nihilistic narcissism; one, in effect, slam dances at the grave of one's limitless potential for intellectual and spiritual growth, stagedives into the swamp of simulation-identification never to resurface and breathe the air of silent contemplation.

In short, the rigor mortis of a typical grunge anti-song achieves its rhythmic stasis by indolently clinging to the division of time into measures of four quarter notes. As a multiple of two, four reflects the binary bondage of the computer's ones and zeros which drive the Faustian separation's culmination. Especially in the grunge band Nirvana, one notes the machine's lucrative reduction of an individual's potential to the one of simulation-identification which leads to the zero of nihilism. All of this is crystalized in Nirvana's

bass, guitar, and drum parts, which obediently goose-step, albeit ponderously and sloppily, to the music industry's machine as represented in the formidable order of 4/4. Tellingly, the band's lead singer and guitarist, Kurt Cobain, often expressed a kind of impotent rage at this despite his complicity. In fact, Cobain's honesty prevented him from continuing his role in the music industry's fraud whereby the sole motive of increasing the refuse of commodified objects is masked by a vaudevillian shtick of rebellion and non-conformity (i.e., smashing one's instruments, screaming incoherently, and blasting high decibal noise). Indeed, these trite images of rebellion are fabricated simulations well-grounded in the tar pit of 4/4. Cobain realized this falseness but lacked the ability to be truly subversive. In other words, he was unaware of the liberating joy that results from physical and intellectual struggle. One eventually must escape the bondage of musical cliches and their nailed-down submission to 4/4. For Cobain, the inevitable boredom following Nirvana's immense success, based not on artistic struggle but primarily on luck, would lead to a drug-filled depression ending in suicide. Had Cobain learned a little about the jazz improviser's struggle with himself, not to mention the Faustian separation's manifestations during the mid-twentieth century, he might have chosen another route. He might have recognized his band's desperate attachment to the undemocratic scheme of four quarter notes a measure by understanding how a jazz bebop, post-bebop, modal, or free form band dealt with the Faustian separation's henchman, 4/4.

It is no coincidence that during and for several years after World War II, a new form of jazz liberated itself from the popular and dance-oriented form of big band jazz. Since I am arguing that the preference for 4/4 in the popular music of the twentieth century parallels the expanding power of the Faustian separation (i.e., the growth of industrialization, bureaucratic institutions, the entertainment industry, government, advertising, and public relation agencies, etc.), I must clarify how the first blues and jazz players subtly subverted this order. Then, one may see the pattern wherein each jazz player

subtly subverted this order. Then, one may see the pattern wherein each innovation in jazz, beginning with bebop's liberation from big band, constitutes the circulating form of artistic/spiritual renewal which opposes the dead binary form of profit and loss.

First of all, an extremely important distinction must be made between the jazz improviser's environment from the twenties to the sixties and the grunge anti-musician's environment of the late eighties and nineties. Whereas the jazz improviser often faced the oppression of racism, the typical grunge anti-musician often faces a materialistic middle class world dominated by a seductive mass media. The fact that the improviser's African-influenced music (revealed in the vital complexity of jazz rhythm) was considered inferior to European classical tradition only served to further stimulate his artistic struggle. On the other hand, because advertising reduces every transcendent principle to a commodity, one is encouraged to abandon self-questioning in favor of believing the seductive slogans which replace the ongoing process of self-definition with the stasis of complacency, i.e., "Why ask why?"

In short, the vacuum resulting from one's unconscious failure to enter the inner triadic orbits which merge the finite with the infinite is filled with the mediascape. Of course, McLuhan's exteriorized central nervous system becomes complete with a crucial seductive tactic: ads often flatter the viewer by appealing to his individual character and his freedom to decide for himself while simultaneously lulling the viewer into a state of absorption—a state which obviously prevents the active construction of an individual character who spends enough time away from the enveloping mass media to create choices rather than blindly filling out the predetermined and oversimplified media multiple choice test. The paradoxical truth which deliberately disappears in a hyperreal world is what the true improviser peacefully accepts: like Dante, one can never know heaven until one first knows hell. When one makes the arduous journey which never ends but does involve cherished glimpses into the infinite, one reacts to this glimpse by acting in the finite artistic

moment. The early blues and jazz musicians confronted their hell in the form of Jim Crow laws. Also, the early jazz musicians in the cities witnessed the growing dominance of the Faustian separation which fueled the expansion of factories along with the intense and risky speculation leading to the crash of 1929. Moreover, these musicians were well aware of the ethos of the organized crime contingent which ran many of the clubs featuring early jazz. They must have sensed the binary order of profit and loss driving both the legitimate and illegitimate businessman. For that reason they sensed the need to bring the triadic essence back. For the separation/amputation from/of the infinite circulation of separation/connection, the rational reduction of reality into efficient and controllable binary opposites which never overlap or give rise to each other always had been represented in the order of four quarter notes per measure. The stiff march-like evenness certainly had its value during the age of Enlightenment throughout most of the nineteenth century since it allowed great composers a form in which to fill the divine impulse. By the twentieth century, however, the great potential of the Enlightenment would reveal its darker side (i.e., two world wars, concentration camps, nuclear weapons, bureaucratic institutions) thereby necessitating the innovation of the jazz swing feel.

Early jazz musicians subtly subverted the order of four by stressing a relaxed feel of three against each of the four quarter notes. Instead of the linear symmetry of dividing each quarter note into two eighth notes, each quarter became three eighth notes played in such a way as to suggest the constant swing of an evolving circle: hence, a human representation of the infinite. The history of jazz has been a continuous development in exploring the infinite whereas rock has moved in reverse: a complete identification with the Faustian market place that jazz had come to transcend.

Once the triplet swing feel became the characteristic foundation for jazz rhythm, further innovations would occur which suggest the improviser's complex relationship to 4/4. Beginning with the contribution of Louis Armstrong, the first true jazz improviser,

one notes the emergence of a voice, stimulated by the swing feel's joyous motion, rising above the rhythm section's repeated chord progression and communing with the infinite moment of the divine impulse. Rather than simply embellishing upon the predetermined melody of a given song, Armstrong discovered the inexhaustable source from which one hears an abundance of melodies. Of course, this infinite source always is perceived through a particular consciousness, a unique reservoir of experiences. Hence, each artistic creation is unique, provided that particular consciousness continuously endures the necessary struggle needed to dip into this vast realm.

Despite the presence of swing, most early jazz and big band music still emphasized four quarter notes per measure. For example, the drums, piano, guitar, and bass either clearly outlined or played something directly related to these four beats in their accompaniments of the soloist. The soloist even based his improvisations on phrases which began and ended in close relationships to the beginning and end of each four beat measure. Big band jazz primarily was dance music, which is not to say there were not bands of great artistic integrity (e.g., Duke Ellington and Count Basie). Most big bands, however, did not want to challenge the order of four since they were more concerned with pleasing audiences than exploring the divine impulse.

However, the massive surge in industry brought on by World War II, was another step into the Faustian direction which had to be countered by a unique manifestation of the divine impulse. Although this industrial surge was a necessary response to the Nazi military machine, both were manifestations of the Faustian separation. The Nazis applied the twentieth century combination of science and machinery with a strategy of sheer violence and force; the American version has proven to be stronger precisely because it was not quick and dramatic but a slower evolution. This boom in production, which continued throughout the prosperous fifties, faced only one potential threat to its otherwise smooth progression/regression into a virtually unlimited expansion of the Faustian separation. This

threat occurred during the sixties when the young generation sensed its falsity and protested. Several years later, the entertainment industry, however, found the perfect pacifier in the form of hyperreality, or the relocation of many generation X brains to an assembly line designed to produce well-behaved children who never question the essential truth of the commodification of everything in sight.

At a time when the entire world was divided into binary opposites seeking the destruction of the other, bebop arose as a synthesizing force imitating its infinite father/mother. Re-creating a piece of this parental motion, bebop was an expression of the peaceful partnership of opposites. For instance, bebop synthesized the inside/outside of struggle by creating a new motion characterized by a much higher level of separation/connection. Such innovators as Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, and Max Roach further separated from the stiff order of four far beyond the early jazz and swing musicians' subtle creation of the triplet swing feel. Spurred by the treatment of many whites who considered (and many who still consider) it highly unlikely that a black improviser could become an artist at the level of a Bach or Beethoven, the bebop improviser transferred this outside struggle onto the inner terrain; a terrain wherein this struggle became a personal desire to prove the unbelievers wrong. Hence, the overall struggle resulted in yet another merging of opposites: a collective identity or bebop idiom and a great fertility of individual styles. Moreover, bebop's distinction from early jazz and swing was a higher synthesis or connection with four, paradoxically because it created a greater tension or a kind of asymmetrical cubist density against/with a swinging four that was becoming, save for the bass player, an implied presence or a felt motion anchoring the improviser's psyche. For example, a Charlie Parker solo broke with the clear contours of a typical swing solo by creating a series of rhythmically complex phrases. These phrases, involving additional chords and chromatically embellished melodies, suggest the dense motion of a cubist painting. Both offer an invigorating multiplication of perspectives which

defy the order of a realistic portrait or a song built upon the steady rise and fall of four quarter notes per measure.

Listening closely to a recorded Charlie Parker improvisation, one attempts to find the very same impulse which prompted Parker's musical thoughts on that particular occasion. In doing so, one separates/connects: one tries to make sense (connect) with the complex rhythms and melodies by formulating an interpretation (separation): a separation in the sense that it draws on the listener's own unique storage of memories or experiences. Of course, a thoughtful interpretation cannot be expected after listening a few times to a particular improvisation. In fact, few realize how willfully focused and active one's mind can be when listening to a bebop or a post-bebop modal improvisation. One must realize that bebop flourished in a small group setting: for example, saxophone, trumpet, piano, bass, and drums. This allowed for a high level of interplay since each instrument was creating a sound texture in response to the other. Thus, when one begins to listen to a bebop or a modal tune, one is confronted with the question of exactly what to listen to. Does one focus strictly on a single line by noting how the piano or bass variate the chord progression for every chorus or repetition of the chordal foundation? Does one focus on the improviser's creation of melodies against the main melody or chord progression? Or perhaps one notes how one of the accompanists (i.e., bassist, pianist, or drummer) reacts to the soloist? Or, finally, does one try to listen closely to the total sound?

In short, the ideal listener of jazz enters a realm which would frighten the average generation Xer since the mind-dissolving falsity of simulations is questioned. The finite representation of the divine impulse found in each radically different improvisation runs counter to the dangerously presumptuous reduction of reality to a dead form which swallows the liberating charge of colorful complexity. This dead form has become so insidiously sophisticated that it can condition an average generation Xer to desire the enactment of a ritual, listening to a typical grunge anti-song, which one can repeat

anywhere or any time, as often as one pleases, thanks to the Sony Walkman. A ritual symbolizing one's unconscious acceptance of mental slavery becomes possible only because this deeper fact disappears under the simulation of depraved freedom or trivial rebellion. One acclimates oneself to the repetition of "sell, sell, sell, sell, sell" by shutting off all the valves carrying the divine motion and settling for a dramatic flattening of one's emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual spectrums. In this way, freedom is redefined to mean one's instant demand to fulfill infantile desires triggered by manipulative advertising. One's consciousness, in some extreme cases, becomes indistinguishable with an animal's life of immediate sensual experience, a kind of memory vacuum discouraging that very journey around which myths and religions have been built, presumably since communication began; that is to say, humans separated with their experience through language which nevertheless acted as a bridge reconnecting this experience.

I firmly believe that the capitalistic mass media's total denial of this necessary struggle for meaning in favor of the extremely simplistic and monolithic myth of filtering everything through the profit motive is the beginning of the end of America. Clearly, the youth violence and disrespect for life in the inner-cities and the jaded apathy of many grunge fans both, in part, stem from the same source. When the most influential and powerful members of the older generation, the businessmen, only view generation Xers as demographic statistics or easily manipulated targets for trivial products, every young person's natural desire to find an identity lacks a strong foundation. This natural desire becomes so diluted with the lies of hyperreality that one perversely answers this desire for freedom with more oppression; freedom now becomes one's ability to forget. Specifically, the American university's enlightenment ideal has long since crumbled, giving way to the impervious power of hyperreality. Now, most students view a college education merely as a kind of abstract product they or their parents have purchased. Just like a consumer's attitude toward most products, one expects to be satisfied and therefore is more than happy

to complain if the product falls short of its unstated, perhaps even unconscious, expectation: a product is successful when it requires the least amount of conscious willpower on the part of the consumer. If one told an average high school senior that a college education should involve a significant development in each student's intellectual capacities, and then proceeded to outline the hours of strenuous mental discipline involved in developing critical skills, he or she would be incredulous. Hence, for many students, intellectual growth ends years before college; college then becomes an average generation Xer's last chance to indulge in a kind of extended play time period before having to succumb to the mind-numbing routine, the Faustian separation's dead form which gives rise to the plethora of boring, repetitive middle class jobs. For another four years, many students want to forget about the inevitable "real world." Therefore it is imperative to indulge in every selfish whim (i.e., a generation Xer's definition of freedom): for example, "I'm too tired. I think I have a slight headache. I don't think I'll go to class today. Besides, I want to find out if Laura is cheating on Biff and if Oprah is doing something interesting." Also, who would want to miss an opportunity to conform by rebelling? For instance, the popular ritual of drinking can help a generation Xer forget the boredom of school, the inevitable boring job after school, and the possible anxiety or frustration he or she may feel from failing to practice the art of separation/connection. This kind of forgetfulness is simply a nihilistic form of rebellion; one has been crushed by the hyperreal fist and therefore can muster just enough strength to imbibe desperately to the point of temporary conscious annihilation. One does so to avenge oneself because one does not want to be reminded of owning something—a brain—one never learned to use because society only requires its members to consume mindlessly.

Kurt Cobain was acutely aware of this peculiarly postmodern type of nihilistic self-revenge. He lived it so perfectly life became unbearable. Specifically, he clearly knew about the illness afflicting himself and many other white middle-class generation Xers.

Unfortunately, his knowledge never went beyond the futile cycle of narcissistic confessions. The fact that these confessions were themselves perverse—by acting as a vehicle for more sins instead of helping to absolve them—led him to suicide. Cobain's angst, resulting from the influence of the Faustian separation's postmodern culmination, was heightened when this very real suffering was directly implicated with its cause (i.e., the music industry's cancerous reduplication of anti-music). Moreover, reinterpreted as a simulation, Cobain's message cannot be understood, only subconsciously felt, since the average generation Xer cannot separate/connect; and, besides, he or she often listens for the purpose of forgetting the very problem Cobain expresses in his lyrics. Thus, in a brutal irony (the kind only a dead machine free of moral restraint could produce) that easily overwhelms the anti-self of Cobain's jaded, streetsmart, cool, hip aspiration to nothing higher than self-pity, self-deprecation, and frustrated anger or boredom, the postmodern dead form forces every real desire or suffering either to become a simulation or to be answered by a simulation. Soon, I will discuss exactly how an environment glutted with simulations, thereby discouraging conscious interaction in favor of simulation-identification, affects a generation Xer's attitude toward grunge anti-music. I shall explain their automatic identification with its emptiness despite their innocent confession of dearly loving it, notwithstanding their inability to tell you anything about the music itself. For now, a closer look at what may be termed the Kurt Cobain syndrome is necessary.

First of all, Kurt Cobain was definitely slightly different in terms of the hyperreal novelty standard of the anti-music/video industry. Admittedly, his lyrics are honest (unlike the predictable rearrangement of arbitrary blocks of hackneyed phrases found in almost all popular music lyrics); moreover, sometimes his melodic fragments approach a kind of accidental touch of aural interest. However, when a group or singer signs with the Mephistophelian music industry, they must learn to adapt to the machine's all-powerful and highly profitable mass reduplication of an extremely simplified media image. In order to

adapt, one must become this image simply because the music industry will not be distracted from its smooth, mechanized course by such intangibles as the creativity, organic development, and unconventional spontaneity of the artist. Cobain's honesty leads one to infer that he would have wanted to become an artist, but he was caught up in the paradoxical trap of venting his frustration at the system through the system. Furthermore, his frustration was so confused (due to an inability to separate/connect) that it could be only indirectly aimed at the system through the dead form's conditioning of one's nihilistic self. Hence, it is similar to the average generation Xer's self-revenge evident in his or her distaste for thinking critically or imaginatively and the consequent propensity to indulge in the many forms of forgetfulness: renting videos or watching TV, going to rock concerts or listening to anti-music, getting drunk, taking drugs, participating in meaningless relationships or empty sex, and talking endlessly about all of these trivial activities.

As long as the music industry and MTV celebrate the simulated music of Nirvana, the Kurt Cobain syndrome will live on in the lyrics he left and afflict those who ironically never pay enough attention to understand the significance of these lyrics. Unlike the true artist, Cobain has no transcendent wisdom to offer in his lyrics. Like his audience, he was unable to experience the profound joy found in channeling the divine impulse. On the other hand, he differed from them by being able to describe this impotence, whereas many generation Xers unconsciously assume that this way of life is normal, natural, and never could be any other way.

In the song "Dumb" from his album entitled *Nirvana In Utero*, Cobain expresses a generation Xer's disbelief in the divine motion: "The sun is gone / But I have a light / The day is done / But I'm having fun." Despite the night of the dead postmodern form, one is "having fun" with the artificial "light" of simulations. Naturally, "having fun" occurs after one's "heart is broke [sic]." Indeed, "having fun" constitutes an escape from having to

confront why one's "heart is broke" since, after all, "[t]he soul is cheap." Cobain continues:

My heart is broke
 But I have some glue
 Help me inhale
 And mend it with you
 We'll float around
 And hang out on clouds
 Then we'll come down
 And have a hangover . . .
 Have a hangover. (album insert)

Things do not get much better in the song "Milk It" from the same album. Here, one notes a clear example of self-revenge:

I am my own parasite
 I don't need a host to live
 We feed off of each other
 We can share our endorphins. (album insert)

Unfortunately, too many generation Xers internalize the falsity of simulations thereby becoming their own parasites. They only can derive pleasure from their own media-driven narcissistic desires. They do not believe in their own potential to find the circulating motion where the inside and outside, the one and the many, and the finite and infinite merge. Thus, they eat away at this potential by turning off their conscious minds and denying the improviser's intense physical, intellectual, and spiritual struggle.

In short, one rarely finds a modicum of hope in Cobain's lyrics. With characteristic phrases from *Nirvana In Utero* such as, "Hate me," "Waste me," and "Rape me, my friend" ("Rape Me"); "I'm so tired I can't sleep / I'm a liar and a thief," and "I have very bad posture" ("Pennyroyal Tea"); "I've got a new complaint" ("Heart-Shaped Box"); "I own my own pet virus" ("Milk It"); and "I take pride as the king of illiterature" ("Very Ape"), one realizes how miserable Cobain must have been. As his suicide note indicates,

as read by his wife, Courtney Love, on an MTV special shortly after his death, Cobain had become dissatisfied with the industry-directed simulation to which he had to conform:

I haven't felt the excitement of listening to, as well as creating, music, along with really writing something for too many years now . . . for example, when we're backstage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowd begins, it doesn't affect me. (Interview)

To his credit, Cobain goes on to say, "I can't fool you. . . .The worst crime I could think of would be to put people off by faking it, pretending as if I'm having 100% fun" (Courtney Love interview). Had Cobain been able to escape his narcissistic jail cell, he would have realized that this kind of honesty no longer exists in the Faustian music industry. Plenty of simulated rock stars are having "100% fun" everytime they cash their corpulent checks; they would consider Cobain's honesty naive. Of course, there are many other simulated rock stars who, with the help of the empty postmodern signifier which rejects coherent meaning, commit the act of doublethink: they actually believe they play music—those incredibly deluded 1/1,000,000-of-a-musician musicians who awkwardly mutter cliches now in their fourth or fifth inbreeding. Had Cobain realized the root of his fatal misery, he might have considered taking a good five-years worth of guitar lessons.

In summing up this point, Tom McKusick and Mike Fronnes in "Pathetic Aesthetic" place the particular example of Cobain's lyrics and music within the larger context of a general postmodern attitude toward art itself. The plethora of today's young musicians and artists tend to follow the, by now, annoyingly predictable lead of Andy Warhol by ignoring or spurning the discipline of craft and the rewards of the spirit in favor of suffocating their potential with dead-end irony. McKusick and Fronnes refer to this attitude as the "pathetic aesthetic." They continue:

Pathetic art rebels against the cult of image, but not by claiming to seek the higher ground, as did so many art movements of the past. Instead, today's

pathetic artists stumble down the low road of apathy and alienation, drawing attention to their own paralysis by wallowing in defeat. Feeling that anything worth saying is likely to be ignored, these artist eschew the grand statement and retreat inward. (100)

In closing, I shall contrast a typical Nirvana anti-song (or for that matter, almost every grunge anti-song in general) with one of the greatest succession of divinely-inspired improvisations ever recorded: “So What,” from Miles Davis’s album entitled *Kind of Blue*, featuring Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderly, and Bill Evans, and containing one masterful solo after the other. Also, one might consider the contrasting ways in which an average generation Xer would listen to a typical Nirvana anti-song.

First, let us hear the bad news. In approaching the form of a typical grunge anti-song, one realizes that the simulated composers who wrote these riffs are completely trapped within the mind-pulverizing binary order of 4/4. Unlike the improviser’s relation to the impulse-driven form, the dead binary form totally prevents the possibility of individual impulses sparkling with coherent majesty. Of course, this form shrivels the embryonic impulse-generator within the typical anti-musician years before he joins a grunge band. After having experienced years of internalizing simulations via the formidable tentacles of the mass media, he automatically and unwittingly decides to scream praises to the man-made Faustian God under the deluded, depthless impression that he is expressing himself or rebelling against society. Hence, a typical grunge anti-song is nothing more than a dramatization of defeat: as the sound of the word “grunge” suggests, one dejectedly drags one’s ponderous simulated self through the clumsy manipulation of clichés.

In a characteristically perverse postmodern reversal, this bondage to the earth and the bestial—due to the mass media’s emphasis on the incoherent, memoryless state of animal gratifications—becomes an actual physical pose to be imitated since it is “cool.” One

especially notes Nirvana's bass player who while holding the bass slouched almost to his knees. Undoubtedly, this behavior is a subconscious reaction to the heavy hyperreal fist pushing one's unexplored, empty self into the ground.

The binary bondage of a typical grunge anti-song has several aspects. First of all, the overall structure is extremely limited: for example, the typical grunge riff (a rhythmically and harmonically insipid guitar figure) rarely exceeds two measures thereby necessitating a great deal of repetition in order to fill up several minutes. This kind of repetition further suggests the Faustian separation's postmodern culmination since it denies the evolving divine motion. More specifically, the riff never develops, thereby revealing the simulated composer's inability to create complex musical relationships. Above all, the redundant two measure guitar figure is quite simply a human internalization of the noise of the factory assembly line, an admission of human defeat before the dead form.

By contrast, the song "So What" by Miles Davis, like the practicing/meditating improviser, re-creates the history of the universe, the always new beginning of one's grasp of the invigorating impulse—essentially, the connecting motion circulating within/without each separate individual. Performed in 1959, this song also was an internalization of the Faustian separation's dead binary form, however different. The internalization, embodied in the 4/4 tempo and the binary form (A: 16 measures of D dorian mode, B: 8 measures of E-flat dorian, A: 8 measures of D dorian), nevertheless is transcended via each improviser's unique grasp of the divine motion. Whereas the grunge composer simulation becomes just that, a depthless, vapid, analog echo or ancillary appendage of the postmodern Faustian robo-brain, the improvisers on "So What" willfully transmitted the late modern version of the Faustian separation into mere raw materials. From there, the improviser's psyche became a dialectical battlefield, taking the material of the oppressive object (i.e., one's feelings toward the environment of machines) and confronting it with the

evolving subject's creative charge—a battlefield resulting in the divine motion's spiritual synthesis.

In developing this contrast, one might consider the essentially triadic synthesis constituting the finite representation of the infinite motion found in all great music. Simply stated, each improvisation from “So What” is a brilliantly-conceived synthesis of rhythm, melody, and harmony. On the other hand, the rhythms, melodies, and harmonies found in a typical grunge anti-song are mere reflections (and therefore, at best, contain fleeting fragments of originality) of the repetitive machine environment. For example, the rhythms always cling to the quarter note, especially the first beat of every 4/4 measure, and therefore become as predictable as the click of the metronome. The concept of phrasing (creating unique combinations of pitches which differ in lengths, placement of accents, and the amount of space between them) is totally foreign to the grunge anti-musician.

When it comes to melodies, the typical grunge anti-guitarist lacks the ability to embellish the stilted vocal melody and only can repeat it. If he chooses not to repeat the melody, his only other alternative is to repeat the five or six pentatonic-based guitar clichés which arbitrarily run together crowding each measure of the rarely-longer-than four or eight bar solo. Obviously, the average grunge anti-guitarist has done his time watching the incoherent imagery of television, for his solos clearly show its influence.

Regarding the harmony or chordal structure of grunge, one finds a total absence of internal motion which obviously parallels the absence of one's connection with the divine motion. Specifically, the root and the fifth of each chord always move to another root and fifth, instead of possibly having the root go to a seventh and the fifth go to the third of another chord. A grunge anti-musician's manipulation of chordal motion is akin to the tin man from *The Wizard of Oz* attempting ballet.

As “So What” begins, one hears the universe begin again: Paul Chambers's bass plays three ascending notes in free time; the same third note is heard simultaneously on Bill

Evans's piano. This beginning represents the emergence of the one, the foundation, the bass which rises to meet its twin (as reflected in the piano's identical pitch which is connected to the third bass note). For the evolution to continue, the piano separates/connects, resulting in two chords that build upon the doubled pitches. It is significant that this rising pattern between the bass and piano is played three times (i.e., the three of the divine motion's creation of the universe). Next, the bass and piano double a melodic figure which inaugurates a further separation/connection: instead of the bass and the piano striking simultaneously the ascending third pitch, they separate in their entrances, foreshadowing the rhythmic complexity or dialectic to come when the song time warps from the free time/no time of the beginning to the regimented tiny time (i.e., the minutes and hours of the Faustian routine) against which each improviser reacts by transcending.

As the 4/4 tempo begins (prompted by the main bass melody or divine foundation), one instantly hears the confident, triadic swing of James Cobb's ride cymbal, which provides the background for the inspired dialectic between the bass melody and the echoing chords (played by the piano, trumpet, tenor, and alto sax of Bill Evans, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Cannonball Adderly respectively). The mood established by the rhythm section's interpretation of the simple binary 32-bar structure, featuring two dorian modes a half-step apart, is relaxed and buoyant, for the structure's spacious atmosphere allows the improviser to explore the dimensions of the minor sounding dorian mode.

Building upon both the early jazz innovation of the triplet swing feel and bebop's sophisticated conception of chords and melodies, "So What" reacts to this tradition by creating a new synthesis. Hence, the "beginning of the universe" beginning also signifies the beginning of modal jazz. The simple structure of two chords suggesting one mode type stretched out for thirty-two measures clearly reacts against bebop's cubist density, characterized by two different chords for every measure of the 32- or 12-bar form. At the same time, however, each improviser on "So What" benefits from bebop's rhythmic,

melodic, and harmonic advances. They internalized these advances to such an extent that they were able to separate/connect them.

After the bass and piano introduction, followed by the bass melody call with the piano, trumpet, alto, and tenor sax response, the solos begin. Miles Davis's improvisation displays his masterfully laconic approach to phrasing. His phrasing possesses several striking characteristics: rhythmic subtlety involving unexpected entrances, use of space for dramatic effect, a strict and restrained use of embellishments, and the ability to develop three or four notes for several measures.

When John Coltrane's solo begins, one is struck by the intense contrast since Coltrane's style is very baroque. Whereas Davis works with a few notes in one octave for four measures, Coltrane creates a logically sound, yet highly passionate, phrase encompassing swirling and spiraling arpeggios over two or three octaves for one measure. Listening to Coltrane's improvisation of "So What," one is reminded of Gerard Manley Hopkins's "The Windhover." Coltrane's phrases fly like the "Falcon, in his riding / Of the rolling level underneath him steady air" (2-3).

Cannonball Adderly's improvisation overflows with the lightness of joyful swing. The essential characteristic of jazz, the triplet feel against the order of 4/4, finds eloquent expression here. Also, Adderly's solo is the perfect antithesis of the heavy misery of grunge.

Bill Evans's solo provides a significant contrast with the chordal structure of grunge. Here, one finds the internal motion lacking in a Nirvana song. For instance, Evans plays a particular chord several times, subtly displacing its rhythms while moving certain tones within the chord.

An average generation Xer's listening experience of grunge music is far different. Two aspects of this experience may be described. First of all, most people no longer listen thoughtfully to popular music in general, especially grunge. For if they did, the music

factory would never have a significant fraction of the success it now has in the endless reduplication of sameness. Indeed, popular music is not meant for listening, only consumption. In other words, one's motive for purchasing a top ten compact disc rarely is for the experience of listening to the music itself; rather, popular music functions as a static component of one's aural environment. It is designed to keep one from thinking about anything too deeply; it helps one vacuum or dust the furniture better, it helps one drive, work out, eat in a restaurant, shop in a mall, etc. In short, music disappears because it is everywhere.

Regarding the grunge listening experience, I must reiterate that it can help one forget. After a hard day of going to classes and working in a restaurant, one wants to tune out everything. That is the time when the grunge listening experience becomes totally unconscious. It allows one to adapt to the oppression of working for the corporate monopoly. Whereas the jazz improvisation is a dialectical dramatization by which the divine motion synthesizes the subject's struggle with the Faustian object into a higher understanding, the average grunge anti-song is a dramatization of defeat. The average generation Xer unconsciously identifies with the lead singer while the guitar, bass, and drums represent the noise of the Faustian order which denies one's spiritual potential. The singer's impotent screaming within the impenetrable aural prison of amplified monotony speaks to the similarly trapped generation Xer. Furthermore, the ritual of destroying one's guitar or drumset on stage or destroying a television set in a music video is another indication of one's helplessness. The beauty of the Faustian order is its ability to turn this unconscious defeat into a ritual of acceptance: one can now love big brother because one's ability to purchase a favorite grunge compact disc represents an aspect of one's freedom.

Concluding/Beginning

Cellular rhythms under sound tissues, always an informing motion underlying, that is, must feel first then know/feel—just like the beginning of the universe—so I re-create its history when practicing/improvising, must see one motion, must start from one source/anchor/groove outlining my sense of self: a vital charge, intense confidence, now motion moves me then gradually multiply/divide combining constantly creating shapes which then separate themselves to connect with other shapes always creating new overall picture connecting only by existing through triadic space of time: past present future all of this in mind must separate/connect from merely animal (no media animal machine dead life here—no decontextualized visual—hence, no memory, no logic, no space in which to separate/connect) this not here within circulating warmth of organic motion; “how?” a process of rates and dividing consciousness itself, i.e., separate/connect: so many layers of spinning rates, must find the slowest—yet nowhere near the slow speed of all life’s evolution—the slowest is most difficult so FEAR once entered my inside universe, I answered with conscious division, separated/connected to see my enemy self, relived the heroic myth, and fought, killed the inside Grendel (despite its remaining spirit: fear), now the slow speed soothing sinking into the greater groove as it informs this particular rate, now loving the elastic rhythms at fifty beats per minute, now seeing other rates, now having the strength to confront the outside (man-made suffocation—money so strong that truth is now doubtful); the concluding/beginning: must always practice practicing, always separate/connect—a form separates rhythmic perhaps while flowing together in triadic space/time thus past connects present, i.e., more solo goes on can separate another form part yet still reconnects with first form rhythmic—always connect with future see

simultaneously both temporal directions which parallels the divine motion circle which further inspires my improvisation now at the apex of bliss now separate again from myself/non-self making beautiful sounds and connect by writing these words right here . . .

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